



MEDIA RELEASE

Caregiver Arrested for Financial Elder Abuse

SANTA BARBARA, CA – March 8, 2012

On February 3, 2012 Santa Barbara Police Detective John Ingram received a call from an employee at Montecito Bank and Trust at 1010 State Street reporting that an elderly customer had come into the bank with a caregiver and reported that another caregiver, Sarah Helen Benson, 21-years old, had been stealing from him. The victim notified the bank employee of six unauthorized ATM transactions and four unauthorized checks written by Benson amounting to a loss of \$7,971.63. The bank employee also reported the incident to Santa Barbara County Adult Protective Services and on February 9, 2012 Detective Ingram and Judy Sotelo from APS contacted the victim at his residence.

The victim in this incident is a 71-year old Mesa resident who suffers from ataxia, the inability to coordinate the movement of his muscles. He requires the assistance of a caregiver to move and to do things like write checks. Although he is physically disabled, he is of sound mind. According to the victim, Benson had worked for him as a caregiver for a few years and had earned his trust. Initially Benson was employed through an agency; however in the spring of 2011 she started her own business, Sarah Benson In Home Care. The caregiver who assisted the victim in reporting the crime was an employee of Benson.

Detective Ingram obtained bank statements dating back to September 2010 from the victim, who had accounts with Wescom Federal Credit Union, Santa Barbara Bank & Trust, and Montecito Bank & Trust. Upon auditing the documents Detective Ingram discovered that from October 2010 through January 2012, the victim suffered a total loss of \$53,121.63 taken by Benson in the form of unauthorized ATM transactions and forged checks made payable to her or to "cash." Montecito Bank & Trust was able to provide photographs of Benson conducting some of the transactions.

Benson was arrested at SBPD on March 6, 2012 following a meeting between her, her attorney, and Detective Ingram. She was booked at County Jail for felony embezzlement, forgery, and financial elder abuse by a caregiver with bail set at \$50,000.

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